



UNIVERSITY OF  
GOTHENBURG

# *Competence Development: Conduct of and from within*

## *From development of skills to 'shaping' the behaviour*

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## Abstract

This article aims at analysing the use of such Human Resource Development practice, as Competence Development, to capture its underlying reasons in the organizational setting. The rationalistic viewpoint on the programme is contradicted by the critical perspective, which underlines that Competence Development can be used as a governmental programme to exercise control in a subtle manner. By examining the interpretations of the specialists in Competence Development from the interviews, the article explains why organizations use specified sets of competences and the programmes for its management. I argue that organizations employ such programmes to govern in a more individualistic and flexible working environment, where the competence are no longer just skills and knowledge, but are broadened to behavioural patterns and organizational professionalism. Hence, Competence Development could be interpreted as a mechanism to control and shape employee's behaviour and identity. With the help of the theory of organizational professionalism, the company's role in constructing organizational identity and professionalism is examined, which constitutes the technology of governance. While the theory of governmentality explains the liberal power that organizations maintain to steer its employees in an autonomous and self-regulatory setting. Therefore, I interpret Competence Development as the organizational tool to balance autonomous individuals and the organizational need to control and navigate its employees to company's goals and objectives. This way the power relations involved in the organizational setting are discussed.

**Keywords:** Competence, Competence Development, HRD, Governmentality, Organizational Professionalism

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## 1. Introduction

Development of employees is essential for every contemporary organization that aims at growing and letting its employees develop accordingly. With the establishment of the flexible firm model (Atkinson, 1984), organizations started developing into the direction of flexibility, individualization and relative freedom. Earlier practices of long tenure and bureaucratic control are seen as outdated, while the new career practices and different, flexible and transactional, psychological contract are coming into existence (Millward & Brewerton, 2000; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006). The new contract includes opportunities for career enhancement, flexibility, personal development and continuous learning (Baruch, 2006; Furåker *et al.*, 2007), which shadows previous practices of security, loyalty and life employment in one company. Therefore in the new era individuals become responsible for personal advancement and growth, while organizations need to provide opportunities, resources and tools for employees to develop in an appropriate manner (Baruch, 2006; Krishnan & Maheshwari, 2011).

The learning unities, or cultures, that organizations turn themselves into, are essential characteristics of the contemporary firm, striving to advance its productivity, status, brand value and give tools to employees for continuous learning opportunities (Watkins & Cseh, 2009: 13). Human Resource Development (HRD) could, thus, be considered a crucial area of HR, responsible for employee's development, continuous improvement and innovation (Swart *et al.*, 2012). Companies employ HRD practices such as Performance Development, Talent Management, Competence Development, etc. to enhance the level of company's competences, competitive advantage and long-term growth (*ibid.*).

Competence are seen as the *lingua franca* of Human Resource Development (Orr *et al.*, 2010: 2), which makes it a central element in many HRD practices. In this study I want to contribute to the sociology of work and occupation by problematizing competences and, primarily the Competence Development practice. The rationalistic or resource-based view (Wright *et al.*, 2010) is proclaiming the need to use company competences as a strategic tool to achieve organizational goals, mainly to enhance productivity and retain valuable talents. This is *one* approach how to justify the use of Competence Development, but otherwise how and why organizations reason the usage of this practice? What are the other motives to employ Competence Development?

In this study, I depart from a critical perspective to detect, describe and explain the power relations involved in the organizational life. I want to highlight the question of whether companies employ different generic competences and Competence Development as a way to form professional employees as organizational objects. The use of such programmes can be approached from the viewpoint of identity and how organizations enhance company culture and make employees identify themselves with organizations. The concept of *organizational professionalism*, proposed by Julia Evetts (2009, 2011), explains why companies use competences to construct professional employees, who identify themselves with the organization rather than with their profession or occupation.

Competence Development can also serve as a way to standardize and construct behaviour (Fournier, 1999). Competence becomes an area of redefinition and reshaping in accordance to

organizational demands, which can be seen as a ‘management of conduct’ or a new distanced control mechanism in individualistic setting, which represents the notion of *governmentality* (Foucault, 2007; Miller & Rose, 2008). New ways of control are embedded, not in previously rigid boundaries of bureaucratic machines, but rather stem from subtle, more elaborate ways of monitoring and shaping employee’s behaviour from a distance or from within different programmes and practices, where employees have relative freedom and autonomy (Miller & Rose, 2008). Therefore the programmes for competence management might represent subtle control in terms of governmentality theory.

To broaden the perspective of the phenomenon of Competence Development and to portray it from a different angle employing the governmentality theory, which hasn’t been applied before, the article shows a different approach to examine why organizations use competences in their daily work. Previously mentioned overall practice of individualization and flexibility need to be provoked, proposing that organizations are taking a great deal of effort to control and regulate employees in the autonomous and relatively free working environment. The era of individualisation and a focus on a person, as argued by Yehuda Baruck (2006), should not underestimate the role of the organizations. Therefore, with the help of theories of new organizational professionalism and governmentality this study shows how organizations act and react to the individualization movement with new systems of control on the example of the Competence Development programmes. I argue that those kinds of practices can be described and interpreted as a way to ‘construct’ the professional employee and to control on a distance. The aim of the article, thus, is to unleash the nature of the mentioned HRD practice and identify underlying reasons for its usage.

The managers, who are dealing with and designing these HRD practices, become important carriers of the collective interpretations of competences, skills, professionalism and organizational relations. Therefore, this study intends to use interpretations of the specialists, who work with Competence Development in different organizations, and to identify how they construct the meaning of competences and why they use Competence Development in their organizations. Specialists’ interpretations then are transformed into a general discussion about the power relations that are involved in the organizational setting. Hence, the research questions are: *How do Competence Specialists work with employee competences and competence-centred programmes, such as Competence Development? How do they reason the usage of Competence Development? Why do the organizations employ such HRD practices?*

## **2. HRD, Competence and Competence Development**

Human Resource Development is argued to be a *strategic* factor for an organization striving to achieve competitive advantage and to be successful (Garavan, 2007; Swart *et al.*, 2012). Historically, the American industry started to adapt different training initiatives from the Japanese car industry in 80<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> (Swart *et al.*, 2012: 23-29). The Japanese companies were focusing more on employee development, team-working, but in the same time applying the individualistic approach to each worker’s competences. Through different learning and developmental practices the investments in HRD became accepted by companies in their pursuit

of success, while the benefits for such strategies were acknowledged in business and academia (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001).

Initially, the simple technical training has been presumed to be a core element of Human Resource Development initiatives, while nowadays different HRD programmes vary in range from technical trainings to more complex such as just-in-time training, team-building, Competence Development, Total Quality Management, etc. (Swart *et al.*, 2012). Many contemporary organizations set hopes upon the innovative, out-of-the-box thinking of their employees, which are impossible to capture in rigid structures; it needs development and constant improvement, which is the task of HRD (ibid: 35-36). Moreover, HRD is viewed as the part of the organizations' core competences that stem from resource-based view, where human resources are of focus and, thus, have to be developed to achieve competitive advantage (ibid: 30).

## 2.1. The perception of competence

One of the first researchers, who accessed the notion of *competences*, was Robert W. White (1959: 297), who described competence generally as “organism's capacity to interact effectively with its environment”. George O. Klemp in Watkins and Cseh (2009: 9), on the other hand, focused more on the job competences, which were characterized by effective performance in regard to job peculiarities or, rather, skills. McLagan (ibid: 9-10) distinguished competences and *qualifications* or tasks, where competences are personal characteristics or knowledge and the qualifications are task demands or technical knowledge and skills. Later a more holistic conception of competence appeared, which included not only individuals' capabilities, but also intent or personal capacity to organize own skills to satisfy job requirements and become a competent manager (Boyatzis, 1982).

Such an approach served as a basis for further studies in the field, which were focusing on the broader behavioural patterns that were necessary for performing all the work demands (see Henderson *et al.*, 1995; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2002). The definite revelation came from Jorgen Sandberg's interpretative approach study (2000: 11) that connected two separate nodes of work and worker. He concluded that competences are consistent of the meaning of work employee experiences and enacts, in other words, competences constitute one entity where work and a worker are intertwined. Per-Erik Ellström (1997: 267) in summarizing the notions of competence defines it as “the capacity of an individual (or a collective) to successfully (according to certain formal or informal criteria, set by oneself or by somebody else) handle certain situations or complete a certain task or job”. Therefore, the concept of competence has been broadened by the inclusion of behaviour competences prescribed by the organization for particular job or position.

This behavioural development, together with further advancement in strategic perception of human resources, initiated the resource-based view model with its primer focus on competitive advantage and core competencies (Wright *et al.*, 2010: 19). The concept of *core competencies* was introduced in the strategic management literature by C.K. Prahalad and Gary Hamel (1990), in regard to organization's overall core competencies or rather ‘collective learning’. Those competencies are not only personal-based with individual's knowledge, skills, abilities, but represent a broader strategic understanding of competences as a mindset of a firm that performs

distinctively better than its rivals and possesses competitive advantage in knowing how to manage successfully its resources and competences. Core competences derive from a mixture of different assets blended in one organizational portfolio (Nordhaug & Gronhaug, 1994), where HRD is one of the main components. Dorothy Leonard (1998) contributed to the notion of competence with a similar issue of core capabilities, 'knowledge sets' consistent of four dimensions: employee skills and knowledge, physical technical system, managerial system and values and norms.

Competences, thus, can be seen from four perspectives: as skills or qualification, as the basis for organizational competitive advantage, as an individual's behaviour and as a negotiation between an employee and an organization on requirements. The last two perspectives raise the discussion on the theory of governmentality, which is discussed below. Yet, before describing the theoretical background, there is a need to take a closer look at the research on Competence Development to see how the notion of competences is adapted in the organizational setting.

## **2.2. Competence Development**

In general, Competence Development in organizations is characterized by a set of measures that can "affect the supply of competence on the internal labour market" (Ellström & Kock, 2009: 37), which includes measures for recruitment, promotion, personal mobility, education and training, job rotations or team organization. Therefore, Competence Development practices are understood and applied not only in regard to training and learning, but to a broad activity, which accumulates development processes with different origins.

Previous research, conducted by Steen Høystrup and Per-Erik Ellström (2007 in *ibid*: 37-38), introduced an analytical model for different workplace learning strategies. They identified two dimensions of individual and organizational learning in respect to the formal (curriculum-based) and the informal (practice-based) learning aspects. The study is concluded with two practices for the individual dimension (school model and on-the-job training or informal training at work) and two practices for the organizations (in-service training and continuing education, organizational learning and development) (*ibid*: 38). The current study focuses on the organization-based practices and their influence on the individual practices of self-development.

According to Prahalad and Hamel (1990), the importance of establishing core company competences is essential for strategic planning and achieving organizational goals, therefore Competence Development is mainly viewed as a tool to enhance economic value. Since the article is exploring different reasons for organizations to have Competence Development programmes, it is important to highlight the other prominent viewpoints on that issue. One reason to have Competence Development is to create more opportunities for employees and, thus, motivate them better. Odd Nordhaug (1991), analyzing the effects of Competence Development programme on participants, revealed that particularly training helps employees to motivate themselves better for further learning. It also creates opportunities for career development with clear career paths and provides tools for individual development in improving social and personal skills.

Donald Kirkpatrick (1959) classifies four types of effects of training on organizations, which could be applied for Competence Development and is summarized as follows: (a) participant's involvement in and evaluation of educational processes; (b) effects on the individual level in regard to the acquired knowledge and skills, possible change of attitude; (c) enhancement of the job performance; (d) improved performance at the business level in consideration of team or overall organizational performance. Jukka Tuomisto (1986) highlights that training improves the legitimacy of the job in connection to the goals and power relations, while it also creates and advances organizational culture through better understanding of the inner relationships, goals and values. All the mentioned effects are connected to the rationalistic reasons bound to the organizational need to perform distinctively better, to generate profit and to retain valuable personnel.

It is also claimed that Competence Development serves as an important democratizing factor in working life by giving power to employees in setting up individual competences (Illeris, 2009: 85). Yet, it is a questionable issue whether individuals have a choice and a voice in deciding for the competences. Hence, Knud Illeris (ibid: 98) argues that learning and self-development is hopelessly assumed to be in a personal domain, which works in the system of constraints and restrictions that organizations put individuals into by defining specific competences. The individual effects such as motivation, enhancement of skills, change of attitude and behaviour can be summarized in one concept of company culture. According to Mats Alvesson (2013), organizational culture can be used as an effective organizational tool to exercise power over employees' behaviour. Competence Development, thus, creates and supports company culture and sustains particular power relations within the organization. The critical perspective on competences and Competence Development in line with these reflections is further outlined.

### **2.3. Construction of competence**

The notion of competences has been instrumentalized during the last few decades, as mentioned in previous sections. Considering that Competence Development is involved in continuous power struggle, competence is not a neutral phenomenon (Gadotti, 2009: 19), but rather a market- and organization constructed concept. Moacir Gadotti (ibid) highlights that Competence Development has no concern for comprehensive education and development of human qualities and intellect, but is preoccupied with specific skills and competences needed for a market and for a job. The emphasis on efficiency and goal-orientation changes the essence of education from the free pedagogical act to the corporate act of control (ibid).

Competence might be seen as a floating signifier and a very trendy HRD term. Adopted from Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the term *floating signifier* in this case, means that competence is an empty word, which can be interpreted differently by different parties. Gordon Lafer (2004:118 in Sawchuk, 2009: 126) describes competence as 'nothing more than "whatever employers want"'. As Thomas Brante (2011: 8) argues, the managerial ideology currently in power determines what competences are the most influential for professionals. The altering nature of the professionalism phenomenon and the organizational control over professional competences is discussed further in the respective paragraph.

At the macro level, Soonghee Han (2009: 58) claims that capitalism dictates the perception of the competences as a commodity, to be precise “commodified human ability”, which can be bought or sold; hence, competence is an invention for better market functioning and continuous process of the social exchange involved in the working process. Therefore, competences can be characterized as twofold: representing subjective domain with personal knowledge or experience and socially constructed perception, which shapes the individual and puts the monetary exchange value tag on competences that become a market based property (ibid: 58-59).

Paul du Gay and his colleagues (1996: 269) argue that human life at the micro level becomes an enterprise in itself, where an individual is engaged in self-branding and the construction of an ‘excellent self’. The enterprise, thus, plays on the balance between own economic objectives and individuals desire to succeed and self-actualize (ibid: 271), which is created through construction of competence needed to achieve both ends. Those human characteristics or competences are aimed at being instrumentalized for further control over human behaviour. According to du Gay *et al.* (1996: 264), the competence approach constitutes a balance between the individual and the organizational structure and represents the new relationships between an individual and an organization, based on entrepreneurial spirit, flexibility and personal development. It is argued that contemporary organizational ideology creates a myth about competent managers that has been ‘made up’ to grant individuals with behaviours and attributes recognized as acceptable (ibid). Managers, thus, are encouraged to develop the ‘self’ in accordance with the organizational requirements on competences.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

Departing from a critical perspective, the theory of governmentality and organizational professionalism are used to give explanation for the system, where self-regulatory individuals are governed on a distance from within and by the use of different competence programmes.

#### **3.1. The theory of governmentality**

The theory of governmentality provides an understanding of power relations involved in the organizational context, where the autonomous employees are to be governed on a distance. HRD programmes and Competence Development, in particular, are aimed at standardizing the behaviour of employees. These practices constitute the programmes of government, which monitor and navigate individuals into the organization-driven directions. The theory of governmentality draws on Michael Foucault’s (2007) work and research conducted by other academics (Dean, 1999; Miller & Rose, 2008; Fimyar, 2008). The attempt was to understand power relation and dynamics of the government or a state-like organization to perform and produce meaning and social relations.

Governmentality constitutes a liberal power, which does not require territorial control or control of the individual’s body (Larsson *et al.*, 2012: 11). The purpose is to control human life with help of expert knowledge, statistics and calculations, which dictates the best way to govern life, death, organization, etc. (Foucault, 2007). Nonetheless, this type of power governs in the name of freedom and gives enough autonomy and self-regulation for the citizens, responsible for own



choices in life (see Rose, 1999). It is argued that independent and self-regulating actors still need guidance, regulations and control that opens up a paradoxical discussion on how autonomous individuals can be objects of the systemic administration (Dean, 1999: 99). Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose (2008) claim that contemporary form of power represents no less control mechanisms, but rather different regulations and policies, which struggle to govern in the liberal and individualistic system.

The theory of governmentality identifies three important elements, such as *rationalities of government*, *programmes of government* and *technologies of government* (ibid). *Rationalities* constitute moral, epistemological and idiomatic aspects of governance, meaning that they represent the rationalities of living through ideas, concepts, theories that employ particular language and aim at determining and solving existing problems (ibid: 58-61). Rationalities in the organizational context can be found in economic efficiency, mutual responsibility, customer-orientation, etc. *Programmes of government* are activities focused on solving the problems of rationalities that are assumed to be measurable, controllable and manageable (ibid: 61-63). Different trainings, practices and activities can be programmes of government in organizational case. These programmes presuppose that certain norms and behaviours can be programmed, learnt and normalized in the individuals, meaning that different competences and behaviour patterns are possible to be programmed in the employee. *The technologies of government*, in turn, are all the aspects of the environment that support and encourage rationalities and programmes to succeed (ibid: 63-65). Different techniques are, for instance, standardization of systems of training, procedures of assessment and evaluation, networks, organizational culture and organizational professionalism; the later will be discussed below. All of these techniques intend to create the assemblage of regulations and rules of conduct that are internalized in the everyday life of each individual.

Governmentality can be interpreted as an attempt to create normalized governable subjects by numerous techniques that shape and adjust people's conduct to particular norms and values (Fimyar, 2008: 5). Furthermore, the governmentality concept is understood as 'conduct of conduct', which penetrates into all spheres of life, representing not only the political domain (ibid). The organization, as a state in itself, introduces different programmes and techniques to govern the conduct of its employees within the discourse of flexibility and autonomy, which convey the issue of governmentality. HRD practices, thus, are seen as those programmes that attempt to shape and adjust the behaviour and performance of employees for the rules and norms of the organizations. In this respect, the synoptic power occurs, characterizing the surveillance by managers of the employees from within different practices (ibid: 10). Therefore, governmentality employs a very subtle way of control, which is not regulated from above but from within different programmes and from a distance through technologies of government (Miller & Rose, 2008: 65).

### **3.2. The theory of organizational professionalism**

The theory of organizational professionalism can explain how organizations approach competences and govern employees with a focus on shaping their identity and behaviour and creating the individuals as the objects of organizations by playing on their identification with the company rather than with their profession. Therefore, this theory can broaden the scope of

governmentality and give clear explanations for the governance on a distance or within HRD programs, where organizational professionalism becomes a political technology to enhance company identification and to create necessary behaviour.

It is argued that the nature of professionalism has changed (Evetts, 2009, 2011), where professionals are under more pressure when the organizations make them identify more with the company values than with their professions (Evetts, 2009, 2011). Evetts (2003, 2009) discuss professionalism by contradicting an occupational with an organizational professionalism. According to her (2003), professionalism is considered not only as a set of norms and values within a profession, but also as an ideology and a discourse that persuade, navigate and shape individuals. Traditional professions are associated with values, norms and identity grounded within the occupation (Evetts, 2009: 248), but due to recent managerial ideals and the implementation of New Public Management (NPM), professions are put under new kind of pressure based on organizational and customer-based values. Evetts (2003), thus, distinguishes two different kinds of professionalism – the (older) occupational professionalism, where the power and discretion lie within the profession itself, and the (new) organizational professionalism, where the occupation is controlled by the employing organization. Organizational professionalism, thus, can be viewed as a way to enhance governmentality and the control on a distance.

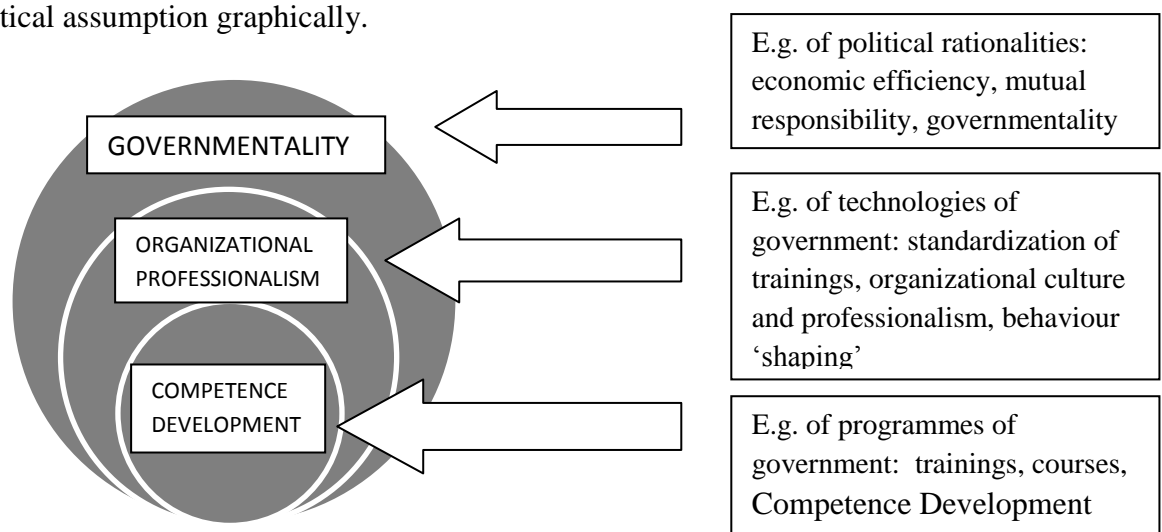
Organizational professionalism creates ‘organizational professionals’, who are controlled, motivated and are expected to play by the rules of the company ((Evetts, 2009: 248). Previous focus on professional networks and identity flows into the new construction of organizationally shaped employees, who are branded by a company and are not constituted by a membership to one particular professional group. Organizations construct the notion of professionalism with the control through hierarchical responsibility structures and decision-making processes, while the managerial control plays a big role in monitoring and shaping the conduct of the employees (ibid). Moreover, Evetts (2003) claims that traditional professionalism is under threat of organizational rationality and systemic managerial supervision.

Competence Development as a tool to enhance organizational professionalism and employee identification with the company can be interpreted as an ideological practice in the organizational setting. The programme also represents a mechanism of control and power over employee behaviour. Valerie Fournier (1999) approaches the notion of professionalism as a construction of suitable conduct and work identity, where specific competences and Competence Development entail the behaviour and identity traces. Indeed, the new discourse of flexibility and autonomy of professional practice is seen as a government ‘on a distance’ via communication of necessary professional competences (ibid: 282). The competency framework, thus, is used to transform organizational values and objectives into suitable codes of conduct, which through the professionalism phenomenon employees get to adjust and live up to (ibid: 296).

Fournier (1999: 293) argues that competence functions as a combination of standardization by setting up measures to value performance and autonomization of conduct by giving enough freedom and independence, loosening the task-orientated nature of organizational behaviour. She

emphasizes that the appeal to professionalism is a new technique of control that works on a distance and represents a subtle form of surveillance.

Hence, the theoretical framework in this study departs primarily from the theory of governmentality, which explains the governance of the autonomous individuals on a distance. The political rationality in the context of Competence Development is controversial because, from one side, the corporate governance has an ideal of economic efficiency, and from another side, it strives to develop individuals and have equal responsibility between the organization and the employee. As a result the rationality of government might be identified as liberal governance or, simply, governmentality. The organizational professionalism, thus, serves to be a governmental technology (Fournier, 1999) in pursuit of the control of the individuals, where Competence Development and the other HRD practices are seen as political programmes, which navigate, monitor and shape the conduct of the individuals. The figure below shows the theoretical assumption graphically.



*Figure 1: Theoretical framework of governmentality applied to organizational setting*

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Research design

I used a qualitative approach in the study: it was particularly appropriate because of its focus on the individual's interpretations and perceptions of Competence Development (Hakim, 2000). In this regard, a broader picture of Competence Development and reasons for its use was drawn in accordance to interviewees' interpretations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings. The qualitative information was valid for the purposes of the study, because it gave an understanding of the meanings that competence specialists provide and the sense they make of Competence Development for themselves, the organizations and the whole professional setting. The study, which has an explorative nature, was striving to trace similarities in a heterogeneous sample to reveal patterns of conducting Competence Development and to disclose underlying reasons for the programme employment. Hence, the personal interpretations and found patterns were used to refer to social reality and to explain the social relations within the organizational setting (Hodkinson, 2008).

## 4.2. Empirical data

The use of interviews, as a method, was the most favourable due to its reflexive nature (Silverman, 2006). A vivid discussion and an atmosphere of trust and productive sharing were intended to elicit the personal views and interpretations of the matters discussed. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to have a more reflexive communication rather than limiting set of questions, and at the same time to have the structure with important issues for the discussion (ibid). The semi-structured interviews were conducted in accordance to the interview guide with number of questions, which were modified after the second interview into the set of the relevant issues and topics for the discussion. The change was initiated as the topics did not limit the interviewees' responses within the particular frame of questions, and it became easier to ask follow-up questions, discuss other relevant issues and access the flow of the relaxed conversation. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The length of the interviews was between 50-88 minutes. The questions or topics for discussion were not given to the participants beforehand to allow the free flow and improvisation. The transcribed interviews were sent to the informants afterwards for their verification and agreement for use.

The empirical data was gathered from ten interviews (9 face-to-face and 1 telephone interview) with eleven Competence Development specialists with different roles, who are involved in Competence Development or Talent Management<sup>1</sup> (see table 1, Appendix 1). The final set of the HR participants in the interviews illustrated a mix of businesses their organizations operate in (Manufacturing – (2), Higher Education – (2), Telecommunications – (1), Energy Production – (1), Municipality – (1), Retail – (1), Medical Care – (1), Consulting – (1)) and of the ownership type (private organization – 6, public organizations – 4). The sample consisted of four men and seven women. The interviewees were employed in both international (5) and national (5) organizations. Nine interviews were held in English and one in Russian.

## 4.3. Analysis

I approached the data within the frame of content analysis, which provided a possibility to code the empirical material in clear categories and to pursue the data in systemic manner in order to find patterns, themes and biases (Silverman, 2006; Berg, 2009). The typical content analysis concerned with *manifest content* was broadened with *latent content*, meaning that not only the countable elements were examined, but also the underlying meanings and signs were interpreted (Berg, 2009). The data has been thoroughly studied and coded in accordance to the found themes and concepts. Further I analyzed the common patterns that were of a repetitive nature and also the cases that appeared controversial to the main pattern. The patterns were further on analysed with the use of proposed theories to create a coherent theoretical discussion (ibid). In the analysis I employed such linguistic technique as metaphors.

Gathered empirical data was approached in the inductive manner, yet was analysed through the theory of governmentality and organizational professionalism. Conducting an explorative research with diverse interviewee sampling, I tried to appeal to a theoretical generalization through the empirical analysis (Hodkinson, 2008). Hence, the purpose was to transform the

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<sup>1</sup> In case of Talent Management that used the competences.

empirical data of individuals' interpretations of Competence Development and its' aspects into the theoretical assumption on the meaning those interpretations and beliefs represent of the social relations and power conflicts involved in the organizational setting.

#### **4.4. Ethical considerations and limitations**

The issue of ethics was considered throughout the whole study: it was especially important in conducting the interviews. According to David Silverman (2006: 323) there are four important ethical considerations for the qualitative study: making sure the voluntary participation; making the information sharing confidential; protecting people from harm; and guaranteeing mutual trust between the participants and the researcher. Those aspects of ethical behaviour were also mentioned to the participants before the interview sessions. I explained that all the information they provided would be confidential, and their identification would not be possible to trace back. The recordings were also listened to only by the researcher, although the transcribed interviews with blanked names could be publicly available.

The clear limitation to this study is the language. Since most of the interviewees (9) had to talk in the foreign language, their views and opinions might have been not fully expressed. The willingness to share personal viewpoints and feelings could be assumed as a limitation as well, since it was hard to make sure that the interviewees were completely honest and willing to share their real attitudes and thoughts. The type of analysis, the content analysis, is assumed to bias easily the empirical material by imposing the sets of categories based on applied theory (Silverman, 2006). Yet, when analysing the interviews, I tried to leave behind the theoretical background and focus on the data to find repetitive patterns inductively. Nonetheless, qualitative research is never deprived of subjective interpretations, which can also be a constraint to this study.

### **5. Results**

There are three major themes being discussed in the section below, each answering respective research question. The first section covers the usage of competences and Competence Development in the studies organizations. The second section unfolds different common aspects of Competence Development, providing interviewees explanations, justifications and reasons for those aspects. The last section outlines the reasons why different organizations employ such HRD practices as Competence Development on a macro level.

#### **5.1. Competences in use**

The specialists in this study work with issues of competences and Competence Development in one way or another. Most of the interviewees said that they have defined sets of competences in their organizations for each role, job or function. The competences usually include technical skills as well as 'soft' skills, which may refer to:

It includes ability, knowledge, precondition, motivation, skills; it's your experience, understanding and judgments. Motivation is when you are willing, when you are courageous, and so on... (*Development Leader, Municipality*)

The description of the main competences is determined by the management in a specified manner, while each role has more concrete details for the competences mentioned above. Most of the time, when the interviewees talked about competence, it reflected to Leonard's (1998) 'core capabilities', which include knowledge, technical skills, management skills and values.

The importance to set the concrete competences was quite obvious for most of the respondents. Nonetheless, few interviewees stressed that competences are difficult to specify for the employees in their organizations: this was particularly present for the HR specialists that work in professional organizations such as in higher education and medical care. The HR manager in higher education outlined:

...what is competence for us?...it's a complex. It's everywhere... it's in people's minds and in what they do and in books, and in the departments. (*HR Manager, Higher Education*)

Competence for that particular organization was a complex issue, since it is hard to set up an assemblage of competences for individuals with a strong professional identity as academics or researchers. Professionals in higher education or in medical care are autonomous in what they do; their competences are specified for them by their professional degree, certificate and a professional group (Evetts, 2009). The organizations *per se* do not take the responsibility of defining the competences, because competences are in "people's minds", although they are definitely specified by the collegial authority that the professional group adheres to. This relates to the notion of occupational professionalism, which is still the predominant ideology in the professional organizations (ibid).

In regard to the Competence Development programmes, all the studied organizations employ different practices for employee development such as trainings, courses, on-the-job trainings, mentoring, coaching, in-service training, etc.:

...you can learn every minute of your work, then we are talking about on-the-job training and that can go through many different things: you can work with the manager ... but you can also work with someone who is maybe a 'superuser' in that area ... then we also have classroom training, inside the company, outside the company, seminars, e-learnings, workshops, etc. (*HR trainings manager, Retail*)

The approach to develop competences and skills is rather similar in most of the organizations, where companies employ different models and practices to get a consistency in the competences the organizations possess. It can, thus, be stated that all the studied organizations use both curriculum-based and practice-based aspects of learning (Høyrup & Ellström, 2007 in Ellström & Kock, 2009). In addition, many participants claimed Competence Development to be a strategic component for the organizational well-being:

I think that's an old thing. I think that you need to have the right competences at the right time. (*HR trainings manager, Retail*)

Competences are referred to as a crucial element in the organization, vital for the company's survival in a long-perspective planning. The necessity to have competences "at the right time" has been mentioned many times by most of the interviewees. Other participants also claimed that the constant changing environment puts a lot of pressure on the organization; therefore it is not fashionable to think of the jobs or occupations anymore, it is about competences and having "the right competences at the right time". Such a state of affairs goes in line with the resource-based view (Wright *et al.*, 2010), where the strategic planning and the use of competences instead of the occupations are emphasised. The core competences of a company become the major organizational resource that has to be examined on the strategic level. The strategic approach to competences is noticeable even in medical care with professional personnel:

But I think the Board is more about having the right people with the right skills. They don't really want to talk about professions. It's more like they don't want to call it that... When was it? 2 weeks ago maybe, I heard they were talking: "Do we really have to say nurses? And assistant nurses? Isn't it old-fashioned? It is about what competences we need. And then what kind of profession do we need. Not the other way around saying that we need a nurse."(*HR Specialist, Medical Care*)

The discussion to have the core competences instead of the job title for setting the right person in the organization is an example of the transformation in nature of professionalism described by Evetts (2003, 2009). The previous practices of concrete job titles traces us back to the professional prerogatives, while putting the competences in the frontline can serve as means to enhance company-oriented goals within the context of NPM and to strive for organizational professionalism (Fournier, 1999; Evetts, 2009).

Interestingly enough, the organization from the quote above is the only organization in the study that has rather sparse trainings. Doctors do not have Competence Development, completely, because it is argued that they are organizing themselves on this matter. According to the sociology of professions, it is the way professionals deal with trainings: the control and responsibility over this issue belong to the professional community and the individual (Evetts, 2009). Only managers, nurses and other non-doctoral staff receive a development support from the organization. According to Brante (2010), nurses represent a semi-professional group with the lesser professional identity, which makes them a target of Competence Development and as a result organizational professionalism. Nevertheless, in this particular moment it is obvious that on the strategic level occupational professionalism is seen as a limitation to a better service and competitive advantage of the organization, the issues that NPM brought forward. Therefore, the struggle inside the professional organizations in accordance with Evetts' (2003) findings is indeed happening, where traditional professionalism tries to resist organizational rationality.

## 5.2. Aspects of Competence Development

### 5.2.1. Introductory Programmes

One important phenomenon mentioned almost by all the interviewees is the use of *introductory courses* for the new employees or an introduction to the new roles such as a manager or a leader within the process of Competence Development. The participants mentioned that they usually have quite formal introductions to the company structure, code of conduct, work environment, legal aspects, etc. For example, the HR manager from the medical care organization described introduction as following:

That's a whole day, in which we talk about different things people need to know about how it is working here... It's about the organization, how it's structured, it's about vacation base and what you should think about... (*HR Specialist, Medical Care*)

The interviewee implies that it is important to introduce new employees to the organizational life: its structure, ways of doing things and other important aspects that explain the common traces, rules and practices. Later on the interviewee explained that the introductory course is also connected to the branding strategy as a way to “market” the employees and win them over in “the talent war”, which can be better pictured by the abstract from another specialist:

...then in the introduction, when a new employee starts with us, we have this sort of training on the website also that shows how many different things we do, the diversity in the organization, and we tell them how big we are. And then they start to understand that there are opportunities here... The introduction training is also a step to make the culture and show it and tell the good stories. And we like to say that we have an impact on the everyday life of the citizens, and that's what we like to build the pride around. (*Development Leader, Municipality*)

The quote above gives a vivid view on several aspects the introductory course represents. More than just introducing the structure or the organizational practices, the course strives to brand the employees and create a ‘right’ perception of the organization. Emphasizing such organizational advantages, as being big, giving out diverse opportunities, creating an impact in people’s lives, etc., the course is pointed at creating, showing and supporting the company culture. The “good stories”, thus, are told to the newcomers in order to have them onboard the company culture.

Many interviewees referred to the introductory courses as a crucial element in unifying the perception of the organization and also standardizing the way the organization is seen:

...it is one way of building strong culture to have one programme that everyone goes through and we are sure ... that they know about our code of conduct.. I think it's important. (*Programme Manager, Manufacturing*)

The introductory course is perceived as a way to learn and embrace company culture. The strong culture might be assumed to be based at the standardized procedures and programmes, where the introductory course serves as a unifying element, the first step each person has to go through.



Moreover, the introduction is a basis for winning the employees' minds and branding them in accordance with company's values and goals. As part of culture creation, introduction is the organizational technique to enhance employees' company identification (cf. Alvesson, 2013). Branding the employees and standardizing the ways how to look at the organization can be also seen as the features of organizational professionalism, which is strongly distinguishing from the traditional professionalism (Evetts, 2009: 263). The culture becomes optimized and presented to the employees from their very start at the company. As a result, introductory course is vital both for a newcomer to get to learn the organization and for a company to subdue the new employees and normalize the perception of the organization and individual's behaviour.

### 5.2.2. Employee involvement

Another commonly mentioned practice is the employee involvement into discussion and design of the new courses for Competence Development and the update of the existing practices and trainings. Most of the interviewees stated that the programmes and development trainings are constantly adjusted to the needs of the organization and the individuals, by the means of evaluations, feedback, interviews and reference groups. This involvement is perceived by the employees as a sign of management's care and appreciation, which is assumed to motivate and commit individuals better to the organization (cf. Nordhaug, 1991). One interviewee talked about the employee involvement as that:

We try one course, one seminar, and people, who come there, give voice to perspectives and needs they see... To get acceptance for the need of control you have to start with penetrating the dilemma (*of introducing any practice in the organization*)... and you get them on the hook. And if you get them to penetrate the dilemma, they feel responsible for it... (*HR Manager, Higher Education*)

According to the quote above, once the problem is penetrated to the employees, they feel responsible and willing to act and be active members of the organization. Involvement, thus, is a means to justify any of the organizational practices and the control. If the company demonstrates the dilemma of a particular practice to the employees, they are caught "on the hook", they are recruited to be organizational members, which leads to the organizational professionalism again. The discourse of raising managerial control is noted by Evetts (2009: 263) as representative for the shift to the new organizational professionalism. Therefore, the involvement into the design of Competence Development courses serves a twofold goal – to actually penetrate the employees in the life of the organization, so that they could feel more valued, and to control them by means of feeling responsibility, tightening them up closer to the organization and its culture.

### 5.2.3. Professional vs. Organizational Identification

As mentioned, Competence Development influences the individual identity, considering for example introductory course, which sends a clear message about the company culture, builds pride and makes employees identify themselves with a company:

You don't compete with the latest technique; you compete to have the best talent in the company that's the definition of talent management... so I think you want to

keep the talent, that's why you want them to be identified with the company. (*HR training manager, Retail*)

The retention of the valuable employees is positioned as one of the main reasons to have the Talent Management programme, while the identification with the company is claimed to be important to retain talents. In the study the participants were referring to such important factors influencing employee's identity as the success of the organization, its supreme position in research and innovation, company size, development and growth opportunities, the values and impact on people's lives. Those factors are particularly interesting, because they represent specific organizational features, rather than professional or occupational characteristics.

Nonetheless, professional identity still remains in some professional organizations. In higher education, for instance, this is a dilemma for those working with Competence Development since an academic tends to identify himself more with the discipline than with a particular university or college:

... it's a dilemma of a professional organization...because a researcher identifies himself with his field of knowledge... of course, it will be a dilemma for the head of the organization and the organization as an entity to get these researchers do what the organization wants when it is required. (*HR Manager, Higher Education*)

Although the HR Manager stated that it is a dilemma to work with such an autonomous and self-regulatory profession as a researcher, the organization needs to steer its employees for the course of company's goals and objectives. The Competence Development courses and introductory courses to the new roles in particular are the means to navigate the professionals to organizational identification and professionalism. The Programme Manager in higher education boasted about the implication of their managerial programme as that:

They are presenting themselves as the professors in the beginning ... and in the end of the management programme... they say: "I'm the head of a department!" They never said that before... and we thought it was really amazing that they have changed their identity, so now they see themselves as managers... it's much more fancy to be a professor and big researcher, but with this programme together with all the other professors they also find out: "Yes, I'm a professor, but I am now a manager as well." (*Programme Manager, Higher Education*)

The change of identity that the interviewee referred to is a desired outcome to make employees achieve the organizational goals and manage the departments better. Yet, what matters the most is employee's self-perception as a member of the organization. This quote is principally vital, because the success story told by the manager above relates to the transformation from the professional identity to the organizational or, to use Evetts (2003, 2009) terms, from occupational to organizational professionalism. Competence Development, thus, initiated the shift to identification with the company in order to make employees efficient and to shape their behaviour.

#### 5.2.4. Competence Development for learning Organizational Culture

In the previous sections the concept of company culture has been mentioned several times, which, in opinion of many participants, is connected to Competence Development. For better comprehension of the company culture by the newcomers many organizations, as noted before, use extra courses to introduce the employees to the company, its culture, rules and behaviours.

The company culture represents the internal common ways of conduct, for example, one interviewee related to the company booklet – “The Company Way”, similar to a company philosophy, which specifies the main organizational values. The respondent further argued that the managers are encouraged to work with employees on the values and beliefs from the company philosophy book:

...you can just pick one part [from the booklet], "customer focus", for example, and then discuss it at the meeting with your employees. We really encourage them [managers] to work with “The Company Way”... then, of course, it is important to have it written down. (*Programme Manager, Manufacturing*)

Working with the written set of values and beliefs is assumed to be another aspect of Competence Development, where such competences as ‘customer focus’, ‘teamworking’ or ‘leadership’ are internalized and made into culture cornerstones (cf. Alvesson, 2013). Moreover, the company culture is related by a number of participants as a learning culture – the culture that is creating an overall atmosphere of development and learning. The phrase “in our company you can grow” was mentioned by several interviewees, meaning that giving opportunities for growth and development is a part of their culture, but:

...basically, it is that the employee should grow, but they should grow where the organization wants them to grow. (*Competence Manager, Telecommunications*)

Since Competence Development is the instrument company uses to give developmental opportunities, it is working for sustaining and creating the company culture, and also shaping and navigating employees to the right course, specified by the organization.

On the question “How do you visualize developmental opportunities for employees?” one interviewee could not find the right words at first, but then answered with excitement:

It’s more like a culture, it’s in the walls! Everybody talks about it. (*Programme Manager, Retail*)

The opportunities that the company gives to its employees for development and learning in this case are equated to the culture. The company broadens the culture concept of written rules and codes of conduct to internal learning atmosphere. This metaphor of the company culture as something “in the walls” refers to the absolute penetration of the organizational principles and values, meaning that it is overall and basic. The culture that is built upon the development opportunities in the interviewee’s company is obviously seen as the foundation. The language and the culture are assumed to be the means through which organizational values are transmitted, integrated and learnt. All those aspects of competence management incorporate the culture, and,

hence, Competence Development can be treated as an internal mechanism for creating culture and controlling competences and behaviour of the individuals.

### 5.3. The reasons to work with competences

This section translates what are the reasons for the organizations to have Competence Development and through what techniques companies exercise control: standardization, responsabilization, managerialism. Nevertheless, the power relations involved in the process highlight the supreme position of the organizational goals that justify the reasons to control and shape employee's behaviour.

Few interviewees mentioned that competence rests on the matter of standardization of the behaviour, which is done through the construction of Competence Development and the programmes alike. The notion of standardization becomes vivid, when one of the respondents from consultancy uses the words “whittled themselves”, referring to the fact that with the Competence Development programme the company whittles or shapes the employees in a needed manner, considering their behaviour and performance (cf. du Gay *et al.*, 1996). However, the same interviewee also added:

...it is written on his face, that he is from this company, because his behavioural model has been so largely programmed in him... (*Managing Director, Consultancy*)

This extract illustrates the standardization of the behavioural pattern by the use of competence models. Saying, that this standard is “written on his face”, means that employees in the company are programmed at certain behaviour. The metaphors used give better understanding of the process of standardization of competences and the practices, where the predefined and measured competences create calculable employees with the machine-like characteristics (cf. Fournier, 1999). By accepting the behaviour pattern the employees adapt to the company culture entirely and become the true company members. Therefore, such programmes as Competence Development create ‘organizational citizens’ with correct and controlled behaviour (Fournier, 1999; Evetts, 2003).

At the same time the control is presumed in a subtle form, where employees are usually responsible for themselves in their pursuit of learning and development:

In the ideal world they [employees] create opportunities. So we give the structure and the framework, and in the end a person has to say “I want to do this and this”. (*Head of HR, Manufacturing*)

It's managers responsibilities to make sure that the employees have a good view of what kind of training they can get, but it's also actually up to the employee himself, because the one who is responsible for the development is the employee... (*Competence Manager, Telecommunications*)

The responsibility to take developmental opportunities is assumed to lie on individuals, while organizations provide the structure and possibilities. The individualized approach to careers in

this example substitutes the traditional life-long employment with the organizational responsibility over employee's development (Baruch, 2006). The employees are responsible for their own development and self-actualization, while those programmes just give ways for individuals to explore personal capabilities. The principle of responsabilization becomes a major organizational practice to give enough freedom and autonomy to the individuals (Miller & Rose, 2008). In addition, the role of management should not be underestimated, when managers provide necessary guidelines and support. All the studied organizations emphasise managerial structure and support as crucial in conducting the everyday procedures and leadership, which is a sign of 'managerialism' (cf. Evetts, 2009).

Moreover, the balance between organizational rationality and employee's autonomy is needed to solve the conflict of interests, which appears in the working environment. The power relations that represent two parties, the organization and the employee, are rather difficult. Many interviews showed that Competence Development is strongly related to political issues inside the organization:

You cannot do talent management and help people to develop their career if it's a big democracy. (*Head of HR, Manufacturing*)

But it is very hard to have a democracy in the company, where you have quite clear goals. And if you want to steer, you create rules, you put the paper and write down all the rules: vision and strategy... But instead of rules, I think, control could be better within the programmes. (*Training Manager, Energy Production*)

Democracy is assumed to be impossible in the organizational setting, because the organizational goal and strategy are the supreme elements of any company that strives to survive (cf. Illeris, 2009). Such assumptions are applicable for the private sector as well as for the public (cf. Evetts, 2009). The quote used in the previous section concerning the professional organization in higher education, where the identity change is the primer purpose of the competence programme, mirrors the fact that professional organization that used to have quite a democratic approach to self-regulation starts following the business patterns. The professionals used to collegially decide on the organizational matters, but due to the current rise of NPM such organizations lose its democratic approach. As mentioned by Evetts (2009), the collegial authority dissolves in the organizational professionalism and bureaucratic setting with clear control over collective identity and behaviour.

Clearly the organizations have their explanations to justify the reasons for the usage of Competence Development and other HRD programmes. The main justification is the rational need to comply with the shareholder requirements and to generate value:

It [the reason to use Competence Development] was to get a more thorough approach to look at it [competence] in a way that helps the organization to achieve the goals, more than developing individuals ... (*Development Leader, Municipality*)

Any organization is in favour of developing its employees, its main resources, but the direction of the individual development should be strictly in line with the organizational goals, because in

any organization these goals are of the main importance. Most of the informants stressed the rationalistic or economic reason to have Competence Development, which goes in line with resource-based view (cf. Wright *et al.*, 2010) and strategic usage of core company competences for competitive advantage. The economic reasoning in the words of the participants justifies the control on a distance and shaping of the employees' behaviour, which is the new look of governmentality in an organizational setting.

## 6. Discussion

The study results showed that organizations often work with predefined sets of competences, which include technical and 'soft' skills. Competences are not only skills or qualifications, but represent a bigger set of different capabilities, that are broadened to organizational and occupational competences of meaning (Sandberg, 2000). Only the professional organizations have no control over setting the competences for employees: that is a responsibility of an individual or a professional group. Thus, the occupational professionalism, discussed by Evetts (2003, 2009), remains in the studied professional organizations, such as of higher education and medical care. The HRD practices outlined in this study can be seen as programmes of government, which are created by organizations on the assumption that the competences, talent and behaviour are possible to programme and set in particular predefined boundaries (cf. Miller & Rose, 2008). The programmes of government determine norms, rules and processes that can be enacted and enhanced by the government (ibid: 63), therefore the Competence Development initiatives and competences *per se* are the norms framed into clear margins.

Few aspects of competence management were identified to address the question how the specialists reason the use of such programmes. The Competence Development elements such as the introductory courses, the involvement practice, organizational identification and the culture are the strong tools that are used to legitimate and make sense of the organizational goals, rules and ways of doing.

The introductory courses, for example, are created to normalize the perception of the company by the new employees or the employees that are facing new roles. Such a practice within Competence Development is assumed crucial in helping the employees to learn and embrace the new organization better and to create 'right' perception of the company and its members. The obligatory introductory courses create and maintain company culture, where the new members have to be welcomed, integrated and normalized. The duty to learn the rules and then live them is seen in this study as a political technology, according to Miller and Rose (2008). By the standardized behaviour, shown in the introduction, the employees are steered to the directions of the organizational needs. The introductory course not only introduces the newcomers to the company and the culture but also shows the way how to behave, and this constitutes a control from within the programme.

The process of involvement of the employees acts as another important political technology within Competence Development, where the programmes and training are constantly modified by employee involvement, feedback, etc. Such an organizational practice serves its own function to grant employees with the feeling of active members, responsible for the organization.

Responsibilization, as mentioned by Miller and Rose (2008), becomes a common feature of governance, which gives individuals a sense of freedom and power while practicing control from within. Identification with organization is found to be the next technology of government. It is a profound matter involving professional identity regulation, where, according to the results, companies strive to enhance employee association and identification with the company. The culture has a strong influence on the employee identification as a member of a particular organization, but identification with the company's success, size, impact on people's lives are also significant factors connecting to the organization. The previous practices of professional identification are changed into organizational, where even the professional organizations use the Competence Development courses to shape employees' identification and orient it towards the organization than the professions (Fournier, 1999). The occupational professionalism, in this regard, is attacked by management's attempt to raise organizational professionalism (Evetts, 2003, Fournier, 1999) and create 'organizational citizens'.

Organizational culture is another powerful tool, which integrates company's norms and values into the everyday life of each employee (Alvesson, 2013). With introduction to culture, people tend to subordinate themselves to the cultural norms and values. In Alvesson's (2013: 153) terms, the company culture is both a compass that directs to the right course and a prison that limits the thought of other paths. The present study proceeds in line with such a metaphorical perception of organizational culture, which constraints the directions for the employees and navigates them to a specific course by the Competence Development application. The culture itself may be also seen as another means of justification of particular practices and control mechanisms. The studied companies support their existing cultures in order to obey peace and compliance, for instance, by the introductory courses and working with values and norms. Moreover, cultural and social conformism is argued to be the basis of 'individualism' (ibid: 161), meaning that the compliance with social, cultural and rather organizational norms and values is a sign of an effective adaptation and successful learning process. Individualism is, thus, approached by most of the organizations from the cultural conformism view and can be turned into the organizational tool to create compliant and obedient subjects, possible to be changed and shaped.

These results suggest that all the outlined aspects of Competence Development in fact form a way to incorporate organizational values and norms within the employees. These aspects function as means to create the 'right' kind of employee for a particular company. The organizational professionalism can be used, then, as a unifying governmental technology that integrates all the mentioned results and explains how organizations rationalize and reason the usage of different Competence Development practices.

According to Fournier (1999), the appeal to professionalism is a control technique, if to apply the theory of governmentality, professionalism becomes a powerful technology of government, which controls through the automatization of procedures and the use of self-regulatory techniques applied to the employees. The technologies are created liberally and on a distance to give a greater responsibility to the subjects seeking autonomy and freedom (Miller & Rose, 2008). In this regard, the technology of organizational professionalism with the mentioned above components is the means to map employees on the organizational system and to make them

responsible for the organization as a whole. These techniques portray the complete notion of governmentality.

Contemporary rationalities of government use range of techniques, which establish and sustain the regulations by shaping and controlling the competences, skills and behaviours of the employees. Individuals become the 'enterprises in themselves', meaning that they need to improve their quality of life by autonomy and self-regulation (du Gay *et al.*, 1996), but at the same time the control over them in organizational boundaries is exercised within different programmes. The HRD practices intend to standardize and normalize certain domains, such as competences and talent, to make it possible for the authorities to regulate them. The control is exercised in these organizations by guiding the employees in the right organizational directions, where the competences serve as the basic elements of navigation and control. The transformation from competence as skills to competences as behaviour and identity is, indeed, the picture of the current state of affairs, according to this research. Moreover, the transformation from occupational professionalism to organizational professionalism even in professional organizations is becoming clearer.

According to the results, Competence Development is an influential power instrument. The programme is not a democratic process, where all the members of the organization have equal rights; on the contrary many organizations employ such practices to regulate their employees on a distance in accordance with organizational goals (cf. Illeris, 2009). All the bonuses of autonomy, responsabilization and freedom that the organization grants its employees veil the organizational need to control the workforce for better organizational performance. HRD can, thus, be seen as a strategic element of control, where the HR managers execute the power.

The theory of governmentality (Miller & Rose, 2008) gives a new plausible explanation, why the organizations use competences and different practices in developing employees. The rational need to achieve the organizational goals and retain valuable talents justifies more elaborate employee control, which dangerously use behaviour as an element of reshaping and adjustment. Many interviewees stressed that if the organization does not give enough development opportunities, employees leave, meaning that employees make high demands on organizations. To meet those demands, to be progressive, flexible and opportunity-giving organizations employ quite standardized practices to steer employees subtly to the needed directions. The twofold purpose of the programme can be seen from the rational perspective of achieving company goals, developing and retaining talents and from the perspective of control in a very autonomous environment.

## **7. Conclusion**

The shift from traditional life-long employment and loyalty to the multiplicity of careers and focus on an individual is assumed to be a current state of affairs, however, the organizational role should not be underestimated (Baruch, 2006). Individualization and responsabilization are, indeed, in practise (Miller & Rose, 2008), while the need to retain employees and generate profit is forcing organizations to employ different techniques to control their employees on a distance with enough autonomy and self-regulation. Governmentality, thus, is practiced by the companies



to monitor and control employees in the individualized and autonomous environment. The HRD programmes and Competence Development as the focus of this study provide control within individualized and liberal organizational systems. However, most of the companies' practices are centralized around organizations themselves. Organizational identification, company culture, employee involvement into the organizational environment tightens the employees to the organization and makes employees learn, repeat and live the organizational behavioural models. These technologies of governmentality I incorporate in the term of the organizational professionalism, when companies create their own professionals with strong identity and aim at shaping employees' behaviour in the desired manner.

Hence, I argue that organizations use different HRD practices to shape employee's behaviour and create 'organizational professionals'. Even the traditional professional organizations such as in higher education and medical care are going through a major transformation to employer branding and construction of 'organizational citizens'. The era of individualization and absolute employee autonomy and control over self as a professional should be criticized and approached from organizational professionalism and governmentality issues on a more systemic basis in order to highlight the uneven power relations involved in the setting.

The professionalism issue is important to investigate further on in the traditional professional environment: within doctors, academics or lawyers. The NPM brings about the shift to organizational professionalism, which, according to some respondents in this study, might be considered as a cornerstone for a struggle between the management and the professionals. It leads to another suggestion for further research. The management voice was heard in this study, but a more versatile picture could be drawn from the interviews with employees who go or went through the HRD programme. Then, not only the managerial view would be shown, but also the way employees perceive and understand the development opportunities and the power issues that might be involved in the process.

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## Appendix 1

*Table 1: The sample of the study*

No.	Business	Role	Ownership type	Scope of operation	Gender
1.	Manufacturing	Head of HR	Private	International	Male
2.		Programme Manager	Private	International	Female
3.	Higher Education	HR Manager	Public	National	Male
4.		Programme Manager	Public	National	Female
5.	Municipality	Development Leader	Public	National	Female
6.	Medical Care	HR Specialist	Public	National	Female
7.	Retail	HR trainings manager	Private	International	Female
8.	Consultancy	Managing Director HR Partner	Private	International	Female Female
9.	Telecommunications	Competence Manager	Private	International	Male
10.	Power production	Training Manager	Private	National	Male